

Bringing Communities Together Through Sport

PLAYBOIK

draft version



Bringing Communities Together Through Play



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1. Introduction

Sport has an extraordinary ability to bring people together. It breaks down language barriers, helps build friendships, and creates a sense of belonging - especially for children and youth. In times of crisis and forced displacement, these seemingly simple, everyday activities can offer moments of normality, safety, and connection.

In response to these needs, the Let's Play Together (LPT) project was created - a community-based initiative using sport as a tool for building connections, breaking down barriers, and fostering inclusion of children affected by the war in Ukraine. By engaging children from both Polish and Ukrainian communities in regular, open, and accessible physical activities, the program creates safe spaces for interaction, friendship, and mutual support.

This document serves as as a draft to the final version of the to the methodology, activities, and outcomes of the pilot program implemented in Wrocław in 2024-2025. It also serves as an introduction to the Let's Play Together Playbook - a practical handbook containing detailed methodologies, good practices, and recommendations for local governments, NGOs, schools, and organisations wishing to implement similar projects in their communities.

The full Playbook, available in late 2025, will be a comprehensive, ready-to-use tool for anyone interested in using sport to build stronger, more inclusive neighbourhoods and support children affected by humanitarian crises.













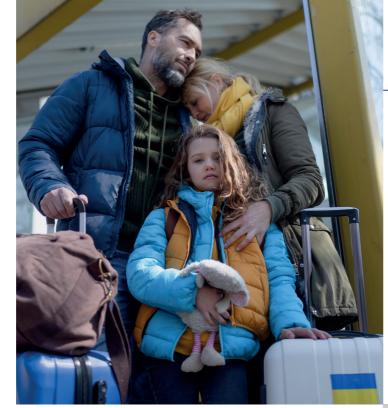






2. Context

In February 2022, millions of Ukrainian families were forced to flee their homeland due to Russia's aggression, triggering the largest migration of war refugees in Europe since World War II. Millions, primarily women and children, sought refuge in neighboring countries like Poland, which, as of September 2024, recorded over 22.71 million border crossings. At the time of writing this document (June 2025) there are approximately 1,000,000 refugees from Ukraine in Poland, including 300,000 school-aged children. Over 200,000 children from Ukraine are currently enrolled in Polish educational institutions. They account for approximately 4% of all students in Polish public schools. In cities such as Wrocław, this proportion is even higher, reaching up to 7.8%. Inconsistent data sets make it impossible to accurately determine how many refugee children from Ukraine living in Poland are not attending compulsory schooling1.



Despite efforts from governments, NGOs, and international organizations, integrating Ukrainian refugees into Polish communities - particularly in schools - remains a significant challenge. Ukrainian students continue to face language barriers, high levels of stress, and difficulties in building relationships with peers. Those not enrolled in Polish schools experience even greater isolation.

Research by the Center for Citizenship Education (CEO), including findings from the report "Culturally Diverse School. Challenges and Needs Stemming from the Arrival of Ukrainian Students", highlights that these issues persist even after a year. The study points to ongoing problems not only with adapting to the core curriculum but also with meaningful integration - often hindered by a lack of sustained, structured support within schools.



Oentre for Citizenship Education (2025) Refugee students from Ukraine in Polish schools: https://ceo.org.pl/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/Enrollment-report_CEO_UNICEF_10.2024_ENG-1.pdf





3. Let's Play Together

The Let's Play Together (LPT) project was created to address these challenges by developing a scalable "Community Sports Tandem Coaching Program". Using sport as a tool for integration and mental well-being, the project focuses on Ukrainian children living in Poland. Additionally, the program aims to support their integration into the education system - particularly for those not enrolled in Polish schools and instead studying remotely via online programs, which limits their opportunities to build new friendships.

Developed in Poland, this model has the potential for nationwide scaling. At the same time, it offers valuable insights for governments, local authorities, sports organisations, and other stakeholders in different countries seeking proven, sport-based integration solutions. Sport, with its unique ability to bring people together - especially children and youth from diverse backgrounds - promotes meaningful interaction with host communities, helping to ease integration and foster strong social bonds.

Piloted in Wrocław, the program can serve as a model for broader implementation in other regions and countries. A comprehensive Playbook will document the methodology, providing guidance for stakeholders to replicate and adapt the initiative to support children affected by humanitarian crises.



Project Goals

Specific objectives of the project are:



To promote community integration of Ukrainian refugee children and youth in the hosting communities of the City of Wroclaw, Poland.



To improve their mental well-being by helping them overcome trauma through sport sessions and mental support.



To facilitate their adaptation and create bonds with the hosting communities they live in.



To inspire other sport clubs and relevant stakeholders in Poland and Internationally to set up support programmes based on the "Community Sports Tandem Coaching Program".

 $_{1}$

² Centre for Citizenship Education (2022) Culturally diverse school. Challenges and needs stemming from the arrival of Ukrainian students. https://ceo.org.pl/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/CCE_Culturally-diverse-school_report_eng.pdf

3. Let's Play Together



Integration and Interaction

Integration as it is understood in the project is a two sided process. It is therefore not only about preparing Ukrainian children to function in Poland. It also involves intercultural dialogue, including teaching Polish children about Ukraine and its context. It is a process of exchange. As such, children from Ukraine are expected to feel that they are an equal partner in the project's activities and not a passive recipient of them. This translates into the characteristics of sports activities, which are meant to create opportunities for interaction between children so that this integration is a dynamic process.



Sport is more than just physical exercise. It is a language that every child understands, regardless of where they come from. That is why integration through sport has become one of the simplest and most effective ways to build a real community.

The Let's Play Together project is based on the belief that a diversity of partners and institutions with their unique resources is necessary to achieve its goals.

Integration goals of the project

- Develop leadership, sport, and cross-cultural competencies among Ukrainian/Polish youth and their coaches
- Promote cross-cultural and mutual understanding between international participants.
- Oultivate leadership and develop capacity for young leaders to build stable communities and strong civil society institutions.
- Integrate Ukrainian refugee children and youth with peers in the host communities in Poland.

3. Let's Play Together



Mental Well-being

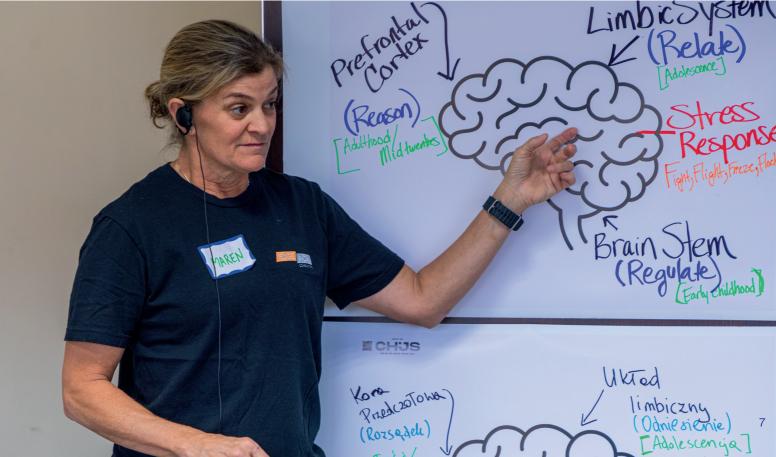
Communities that actively engage in sports and recreational activities together tend to foster stronger bonds and social cohesion. Collective participation in sports and physical activities leads to greater unity, social integration, and a sense of togetherness. This is particularly important for the successful integration of vulnerable groups, such as Ukrainian refugees in Poland, as it creates common ground and shared experiences that promote community resilience and longevity.

Moreover, these activities play a crucial role in supporting mental health and trauma healing, as sport creates safe spaces for interaction among refugees, internally displaced persons and host communities, by offering participants a space to build connections, share their experiences, and alleviate feelings of isolation and trauma. By prioritizing both social interaction and mental well-being, communities can create an environment conducive to healing and integration.

In the Let's Play together project, we use knowledge from the fields of psychology and neurobiology to build integrated and strong communities with the right skills and to support those who feel lost and have lost their sense of security, such as children with migration experience.

Mental goals of the project

- Use sports as a tool for post-conflict healing for Ukrainians that have been displaced, disabled, or adversely affected by the war.
- Use sport-based therapy, adaptive sports, and provide training and tools that address emotional, behavioral, traumatic, cultural-based, and other barriers to assist with providing support and encouragement to participants.
- Enhance the mental well-being of Ukrainian refugee children.



3. Let's Play Together

Program Development and Implementation

To achieve this goal, a tool in the form of a handbook with a detailed description of the project and methodology is necessary. Based on the pilot project carried out in Wrocław, the final Playbook will be created - a ready-made manual with guidelines, a list of good practices and a detailed plan for the implementation of the project by interested institutions, including local governments, organisations and associations.

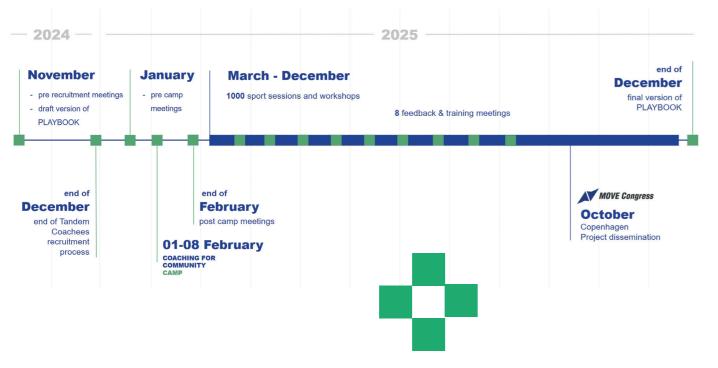
The LPT project equips coaches and youth with knowledge and tools through workshops and sessions conducted by experts on mental health, trauma-informed interventions, mental health first aid and the use of sport as a tool for integration, enabling them to effectively implement these strategies in their activities. The project organises non-competitive, inclusive sports sessions in public spaces, bringing together Ukrainian and Polish children and youth.

These activities are led by Tandem Coaches – teams composed of both Ukrainian and Polish coaches – who are trained to create a welcoming and safe environment for the children.



Project Timeline

The project began in September 2024 with a series of organisational meetings, followed by the recruitment and training of Tandem Coaches. In February 2025, all coaches took part in the Coaching for Community Camp, led by a team of international experts. The camp prepared them to deliver integration-focused physical activity sessions for children and youth. Through sport, play, and shared challenges, the participants built relationships, broke down barriers, and created a community based on cooperation and mutual respect. From March to December 2025, integration sports sessions are taking place in Wrocław as part of the pilot project. A total of 1,000 sessions are planned by the end of the year. You can find details about each of these stages later in this material.



4. Project Partners



To achieve the best quality results, the V4Sport Foundation has established a partnership with two Polish local organizations: the Wroclaw Centre for Social Development (WCRS) and the School Sport Federation Wroclaw (SZS Wroclaw), along with with international partner, the International Sport and Culture Association (ISCA) based in Denmark. These partners have a proven track record of developing innovative interventions and collaborating with schools, municipalities, and prominent international organizations. ISCA, in particular, has organized global sports and physical activity initiatives focused on the integration of refugees through sport, accumulating substantial knowledge and expertise.

V4Sport Foundation (V4Sport)

Following the significant influx of refugees after February 22, 2022, V4Sport recognized its potential role in supporting integration through sports and physical activities, leveraging over 12 years of experience in project development. Established in 2009, the organization is committed to promoting physical activity and combating sedentary lifestyles through innovative and comprehensive interventions, using sport and physical activity as tools for social development. V4Sport's work has been widely recognized - for example, as a best practice example in the European Commission's report on innovative practices to promote sports outside of traditional structures. Currently, V4Sport operates in two key areas related to Ukraine:



- O Developing tools to assist Polish educators and professionals in the integration process.
- Supporting Ukrainian partners in providing support for children in Ukraine through European initiatives such as the European School Sport Day and Move Week.

International Communication and Dissemination Partner

International Sport and Culture Association (ISCA)



ISCA brings invaluable experience in organizing global sports events and initiatives for refugee integration through sport. Their expertise will be crucial in shaping the project's international communication and dissemination strategies.



4. Project Partners

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Local Partners

Wroclaw Centre for Social Development (WCRS)

As a municipal authority unit, WCRS has been instrumental in the humanitarian response to the influx of Ukrainian refugees in Wroclaw. WCRS has been coordinating initiatives to assist new immigrants even before the recent crisis. Key initiatives relevant to the "Let's Play Together" project include:



- Passage of Dialogue (Przejście Dialogu): A municipal public space that hosts cultural, integration, and educational events. It is home to the WroMigrant Information Point, providing crucial support and mental health assistance to refugees, with consultants fluent in Ukrainian, English, Russian, and Polish. WCRS will coordinate psychological and pedagogical support throughout the project, including developing the "Community Sports Tandem Coaching Program" Playbook and training Community Tandem Coaches.
- ESK Parks (Parki ESK): A socio-cultural project that encourages active lifestyles and public engagement in Wroclaw. ESK Parks provide a platform for community-led sports, cultural, and educational events, fostering integration and cooperation. These parks serve as pilot locations for the Community Tandem Coaching program.

School Sport Federation Wroclaw (SZS Wroclaw)

With over 20 years of experience, SZS Wroclaw promotes sports and physical activity among school youth. The "Let's Play Together" project leverages the expertise from SZS **Wroclaw's Neighborhood Coach** (Trener Osiedlowy) program, which organizes free sports and recreational activities in public spaces.



5. Tandem Coaches

At the heart of LPT is the concept of the Community Sports Tandem Coaching Program, built around a pair of coaches - one Polish and one Ukrainian - referred to as Tandem Coaches.

They work together to guide and support participants in sports and activities. This approach offers several benefits compared to a single coach and key advantages include:



- Personalized attention ensuring each participant's specific needs are addressed particularly when the Ukrainian coach can communicate in their native language, making it easier to address specific requirements effectively.
- Increased emotional support vulnerable individuals, can greatly benefit from the emotional support and encouragement provided by two coaches. The presence of a coach from their home country not only aids in communication but also creates a more nurturing and supportive environment for integration.
- Diverse perspectives participants gain exposure to different coaching styles and viewpoints.
- **Enhanced safety** in activities where safety is critical, having two coaches ensures immediate assistance when needed and the possibility for the kids to communicate in their own language is extremely valuable.
- Skill building tandem coaching can be particularly effective in building skills and boosting self-confidence among vulnerable members. Further promoting integration, empowerment, and self-reliance.
- Redundancy having two coaches, including one from Ukraine, provides an added layer of security and reliability, ensuring that coaching and support can continue, even if one coach is unavailable for any reason.



5. Tandem Coaches



Recruitment of Tandem Coaches

A crucial role in the project's implementation is played by largely autonomous coaching tandems. The project involves 22 coaches - half from Poland and half from Ukraine. The recruitment process focused on individuals who are already strong community leaders, capable of building positive relationships and guiding young people through meaningful activities.

The coaches from Poland are experienced educators, trainers, instructors, and teachers previously involved in the Neighbourhood Coaches project implemented in Wrocław by the Wrocław School Sports Federation (SZS). This initiative served as a solid foundation for the ongoing pilot of the Community Tandem Coaching program.

Coaches of Ukrainian origin come from diverse professional backgrounds, but they all share a passion for sport and physical activity. Pairing people from different backgrounds opens up new opportunities and allows for a fresh, dynamic approach to working with children and young people. For instance, experienced teachers bring valuable expertise in delivering structured physical education classes, while coaches from other fields offer a fresh perspective, creativity, and a readiness to step beyond traditional frameworks. This combination means that each tandem complements one another — not only culturally, but also in terms of skills and working methods.



Piotr i Uliana

Yelyzaveta i Daniel

Mariia i Marcin

Ula i Uliana



Nikola i Snizhana

Denis i Wojtciech

Aleksandra i Vadym

Andriij i Oktawiusz



Inna i Grzegorz

Rafał i Mykoła



Michał i Anastazja

5. Tandem Coaches

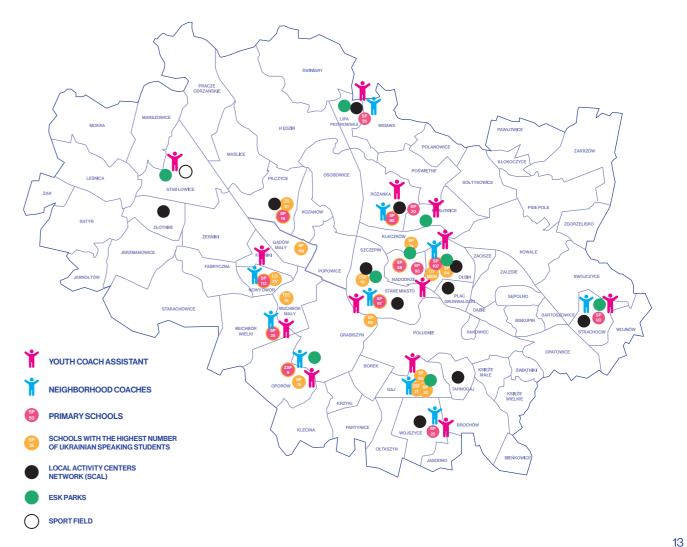


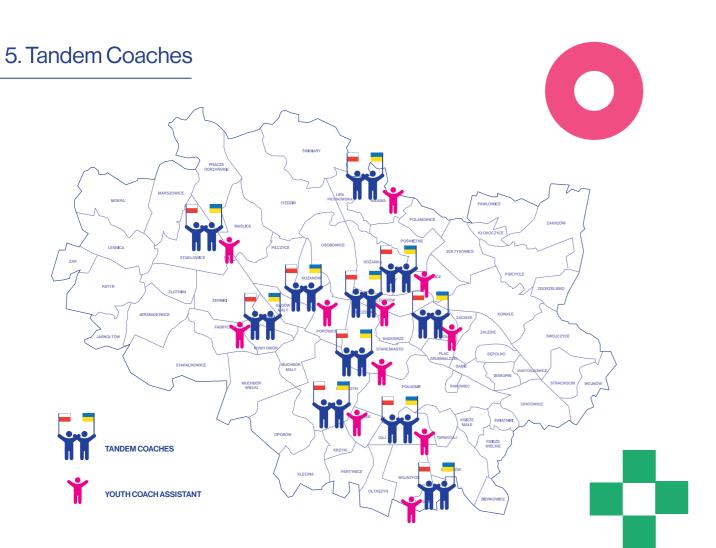
Areas of Work

Clearly and accurately defining the workplaces of the Tandem Coaches has been possible thanks to close collaboration with local partners - Wroclaw Centre for Social Development (WCRS) and School Sport Federation Wroclaw (SZS Wroclaw).

Locations Tandem Coaches works have been strategically selected based on several key criteria:

- Proximity to schools with high numbers of Ukrainian-speaking students. Recognizing the significant Ukrainian community in Wrocław, schools have been identified through the Wrocław City Department of Education with substantial Ukrainian student populations to ensure programs effectively serve those who will benefit most.
- Accessibility to ESK Parks. Activities have been set near ESK Parks, vibrant community hubs offering free cultural and sports events on weekends, safe and engaging environments that foster community involvement and cultural exchange.
- **Proximity to Local Activity Centers.** These centers serve as focal points for community engagement, offering resources and spaces for various activities. Positioning Tandem Coaches work areas near these centers ensure participants have access to additional support and opportunities.
- **Existing network of Neighborhood Coaches.** Collaborating with these established mentors allows for seamless integration of our programs and ensures sustainability.





Participants of Tandem Coaches Run Activities

The main beneficiaries of the project are Ukrainian and Polish children who take part in sports activities and, through them, experience the intended positive outcomes of the program. The project primarily focuses on children and youth who do not usually participate in organised sports activities.

The LPT project focuses on two main groups:

Ukrainian children and youth attending Polish schools - although schools provide natural opportunities for integration, recent reports indicate that shared physical spaces alone are insufficient for meaningful social interaction. Ukrainian children and youth face stress, language barriers, and emotional challenges, while Polish students and teachers grapple with the complexities of diverse classrooms.

By integrating trauma-informed coaching, sports, and mentorship, the LPT project not only promotes social cohesion but also addresses the mental health needs of these children and youth, fostering emotional resilience and reducing stigma around seeking psychological support.

Ukrainian children and youth not attending Polish schools - these children and youth have even fewer opportunities to engage with Polish peers, leading to social isolation.

The project uses sports and physical activities to overcome these challenges, aligning with global strategies like UNHCR's "More than a Game" initiative, which recognizes the role of sports in addressing the social, psychological, and physical needs of refugees.





5. Tandem Coaches

The Formula for the Activities

The activities are free of charge and open to all children. They can join without needing to enrol, register, or explain their absence. The idea is to organise activities close to where children live, making it easy and convenient for them to take part. Thanks to this open format, the activities remain accessible to a changing group of participants, rather than a fixed or closed one.

Children take part in sports activities regularly led by Tandem Coaches. Participation in these activities is active, but does not require continuous, intensive effort, nor is it focused solely on achieving sporting excellence. The emphasis is on building relationships between participants, using elements of classroom-based methodology applied by coaches trained in international organisations that use sport as a tool for integration.



Intended Effects on Participants

Direct effects:

- Direct engagement young people affected by war participate in meaningful activities with their peers in host communities, strengthening their sense of belonging and involvement.
- Adaptation to new environments children with refugee experience are supported in adapting to their new surroundings, including integration into local culture and the education system.
- Improved physical and mental wellbeing regular involvement in physical activity improves both physical and mental health, fostering healthier, more confident individuals.
- Relationship building participants form connections within host communities, strengthening social integration and a sense of belonging. Ideally, Polish and Ukrainian children interact beyond organised sessions, building lasting friendships.
- Meeting emotional needs the project addresses emerging emotional needs among Polish children in response to the evolving social landscape, helping channel emotions into positive behaviours while fostering empathy and understanding.

Long-term effects:

- Improved mental health through participation in activities, the project helps participants strengthen their mental wellbeing, counteracting alienation and supporting recovery from trauma.
- Sustainable integration the initiative contributes to the long-term integration of refugee children and young people within host communities, promoting a more inclusive and cohesive society.



6. Coaching for Community Camp

6. Coaching for Community Camp



From 1 to 8 February 2025, Trzebnica - a town just outside a Wrocław - hosted the Coaching for Community Camp. It was an intensive and inspiring training program designed for Tandem Coaches, and young participants - potential Assistant Coaches. The camp offered a unique combination of theoretical sessions, practical workshops, and activities developed by experts. Tandem Coaches learned unique methods and practices in integration through sport. Its goal was to teach participants how to use sport as a tool for healing and mental well-being for Ukrainian children and youth displaced or adversely affected by the war. Sport-based therapy, adaptive sports, and training addressing emotional, behavioral, traumatic, and cultural barriers equipped participants to better support and encourage young people while enhancing their mental well-being. Nearly 100 participants took part in the camp. This immersive experience played a key role in building the foundation for the LPT initiative.

At the same time, it provided a unique experience for young participants from Poland and Ukraine. Through sport, fun, and shared challenges, they built relationships, broke down barriers, and formed a community based on cooperation and mutual respect.



The volunteers are local young people aged 14–18 who are eager to take part in an engaging project that helps them build new relationships and develop social and leadership skills. Their participation in the camp was voluntary, and their presence, involvement, and support for the tandem coaches provide an effective way to reach the target groups - Polish and Ukrainian children. As peers, they naturally understand one another, helping to break down social and cultural barriers.

The workshops were conducted by specialists from prestigious organisations:

- Center for Healing and Justice Through Sport (U.S.)
- Edgework Consulting (U.S)
- Fútbol Más France (FR)
- Olympic Refugee Foundation (CH)
- Polish Red Cross (PL)
- StreetGames (UK)
- Red Cross Red Crescent Movement MHPSS Hub (DK)

These experts provided invaluable insights on how to create safe, engaging environments that foster healing, integration, and community building.

FHI360 played a key role in the success of the Camp, bringing U.S. experts with extensive experience in coaches to work with vulnerable populations". Their expertise was crucial in ensuring that our coaches were ready to support the emotional well-being of the children and youth they would be working with.

Combining mental health training, insights from international experts and a focused, collaborative environment, the Camp in Trzebnica prepared Tandem Coaches for their role in the LPT project.



















WATCH TESTIMONIALS OF THE CAMP PARTICIOANTS





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8. LPT at the Moving People Moving Poland Conference



From 7 to 24 April 2025, an outdoor exhibition presenting the Let's Play Together project was held on Świdnicka Street, right next to Wrocław's market square. Twelve display boards showcased photos of all the Polish-Ukrainian Tandem Coaches working in the city, accompanied by short profiles of each pair.

For the coaches, it was not only a form of recognition for their work but also an extra source of motivation and pride - an opportunity to share their involvement with family, friends, and the local community.

The exhibition also proved to be an excellent tool for promoting the project among Wrocław's residents, with its content widely shared via social media and used in promotional materials.









From 11 to 13 June 2025, Wrocław became the centre of discussions on the role of sport in building strong, inclusive communities. This was thanks to the first Polish edition of the Moving People Moving Poland conference, organised by the V4Sport Foundation. The event was held in partnership with the International Sport and Culture Association (ISCA) as part of the international Moving People - Moving Europe series.

Among the initiatives showcased was the Let's Play Together project, which featured both in the official conference programme and during a dedicated discussion panel. Participation in this event was particularly valuable, as it provided an opportunity to promote the project among teachers, school principals, and local government representatives from across Poland - people for whom issues of integration and working with refugee children remain a pressing, everyday challenge.

The panel included two Ukrainian Tandem Coaches, who shared their experiences of working within the project:



Daniel Kasyan pointed out that the cooperation between two people with different backgrounds allows them to complement each other and bring fresh perspectives to working with children. He also observed that after just a few training sessions, the children no longer focus on who knows whom, which class they attend, or where they come from. What matters is shared activity, relationship-building, and mutual support.



Inna Kunitska, meanwhile, emphasised the importance of having someone on the coaching team who speaks the children's native language - especially in moments of emotional difficulty, when children want to express themselves in the language in which they think and feel most freely

The presence of Let's Play Together at such a conference was not only a form of recognition for the efforts of Tandem Coaches, but also an important step in raising awareness and inspiring other communities to implement similar initiatives. Among the attendees were representatives from 12 of Poland's largest cities, all facing similar challenges in the field of integration. The conference served as a national dissemination event and a valuable platform to strengthen the project's reputation as a proven integration model, ready for adaptation in other cities and communities.

8. LPT at the Moving People Moving Poland Conference



ABC Mental Health Workshop

On the final day of the conference, Tandem Coaches took part in a dedicated "ABC Mental Health" workshop led by Charlotte Bruus Dalsgaard, a Danish mental health expert and experienced trainer specialising in psychosocial support for children and youth. The session provided participants with practical tools to recognise and respond to the emotional needs of the children they work with, helping them create safe, supportive environments during their sports activities.







Ensuring the safety and well-being of children and young people during sports activities is a fundamental responsibility of every coach. That is why, as part of the Let's Play Together project, Tandem Coaches participated in a dedicated first aid training session organised by the Wrocław Centre for Social Development (WCRS).

This practical and hands-on training not only increased the safety standards of the activities but also strengthened the confidence of Tandem Coaches in handling unexpected situations. For many of them, it was a first opportunity to acquire or update these essential life-saving skills - an invaluable asset in their daily work with children and youth.







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9. Let's Play Together on The Radio Waves



On 17 June 2025, the Let's Play Together project was featured on Radio Rodzina. The guests of the programme were Jakub Kalinowski, President of the V4Sport Foundation, and Inna Kunitska – a Tandem Coach involved in the project. During the interview, they talked about the origins of the initiative, how the Polish-Ukrainian Tandem Coaches work together, and the positive impact of open, integrative sports activities for children.

It was emphasised that the training sessions are open to all children – from Ukraine, Poland, and other backgrounds - and no prior registration is required. Anyone interested can simply come in comfortable sportswear.

The current schedule and training locations are available on the project's website:

play-together.eu

Inna Kunitska also shared her personal experience of over three years of working towards Polish-Ukrainian integration, highlighting that sport has proven to be the most effective and natural tool for building connections, breaking down barriers, and creating shred experiences for children.

The recording of the programme remains available online on the **Radio Rodzina website:**





Appendix



- 1. Center for Healing and Justice Through Sport (CHJS)
 - "Nothing heals like sport playbook for coaches"
- Olympic Refugee Foundation and Red Cross Red Crescent Movement MHPSS Hub "Sport Coach+ guidance document"
- 3. Street Games
 - "Activator Essentials"
- 4. RCRC Movement MHPSS Hub
 - "A Short Introduction to Psychological First Aid"



"Sport for healing - The Case For Sport As a Medium to Foster Healing From Psychological Trauma"





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